

LET'S Talk

SPRING 2003

HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

Your EAP: Call On Us

WE ARE LIVING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES. A threat of war is looming. Military members and reservists are being deployed daily. Deployments are forcing many families to adjust to a new way of life. Government employees are assuming additional work loads. Many of us are feeling a bit off kilter and worried about what the future holds. The articles in this spring edition of Let's Talk provide helpful hints to improve both your physical and emotional well-being during this time of uncertainty.

If you are feeling that you could use some additional support in confronting a difficult situation, the EAP is available to assist you all day, all week, all year. Call 1-800-222-0364 (TTY 888-262-7848) to be connected with a counselor in your area.

Enjoy your newsletter and remember that whenever you see the VOD symbol and three-digit code you can access additional information on that topic by visiting www.vitality.com.

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Making Sense of Medical Advice

IF SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY HEALTH NEWS HAS YOU CONFUSED, learn how to read between the lines.

Remember these recommendations the next time you hear or read about a new health tip.

Check It Out

- **BE SUSPICIOUS OF ADVICE THAT SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE** — because it probably is. Watch for so-called "experts" who pretend they can do what medical doctors can't.
- **INVESTIGATE THE ADVICE BEFORE FOLLOWING IT.** Closely examine who's giving the health advice and consider the possible motivations.
- Also, watch out for word-of-mouth endorsements, sensationalized advertising and emotional success stories.
- **PUT THE ADVICE IN PERSPECTIVE.** Most studies tell only a small part of a big story. Not until a significant amount of evidence has been collected and evaluated do government agencies or health associations draw conclusions and make new recommendations.
- **DON'T FOLLOW ADVICE BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BELIEVE IT'S TRUE.** Desperation can make people vulnerable to believing lies or bad information, no matter how doubtful or unsubstantiated the claims may be.
- **WATCH FOR ATTACKS ON MAINSTREAM MEDICINE.** Scam artists want you to believe there's something wrong with standard medicine in the United



States, or that doctors and drug companies have conspired to keep secrets from you.

For reliable information, turn to reputable sources, such as the American Medical Association, American Stroke Association or similar groups. And check whether medical studies have appeared in credible journals, such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* or *Pediatrics*.

- **RUN THE ADVICE PAST YOUR DOCTOR.** He or she knows how to look at new health information with a critical mind and put it in perspective.
- **LISTEN TO ALTERNATIVE ADVICE WITH AN OPEN MIND.** Even the prestigious, mainstream National Institutes of Health has an office to study alternative forms of medicine, such as acupuncture. It's appropriate to keep looking for new ideas and alternatives, but it's just as important to be discriminating.

By Barbara Floria.

in the know

Late-Breaking Health News

>> Common mood disorders may be inherited. One study at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore examined 203 families in which at least one member had bipolar disorder. Researchers found that if one family member had both panic disorder and bipolar disorder, then the risk of panic disorder in other relatives was greatly increased. They also determined that panic disorder and manic depressive (bipolar) illness probably aren't separate diseases, but different forms of a shared and complex biological condition with a probable common cause.

>> "Energy drinks" stir health debate. So-called energy drinks — a new breed of concoctions with high doses of caffeine and sugar and a mixture of herbs and other substances — are fast becoming the younger generation's pick-me-up of choice. But some doctors and nutritionists question the drinks' safety, especially since some people mix the strong stimulants with alcohol. Drink-makers insist the products are harmless if people who use them stay hydrated. Water is an issue because caffeine, a diuretic, promotes fluid loss.

>> Combining common medications with the popular "club drug" ecstasy can cause a stroke. Mixing serotonin-enhancing drugs — used to treat depression and other mental disorders — anti-migraine agents, decongestants, diet pills or amphetamines with the illegal drug ecstasy increases the risk of stroke. Combining these drugs also can cause sudden, severe headaches and seizures, according to a study published in *Neurology*.




>> MIDDLE-AGED MEN WITH SYMPTOMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS, such as depression and anxiety, are more than three times as likely to suffer a fatal stroke than middle-aged men who aren't distressed, according to research reported in *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*. The connection was graded, meaning the risk increased as depression and anxiety worsened. Other studies have shown a link between depression and anxiety and changes in the autonomic nervous system, which regulates heart rate and the contraction of blood vessels. Those changes may produce alterations that contribute to the severity of stroke, the third-leading cause of death in the United States, ranking behind heart disease and cancer.

Remember, your EAP is a resource to help you deal with stress. Call 800-222-0364.

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How to Feel Good When Your Life Isn't Perfect

MOST PEOPLE HAVE THOUGHTS AND DREAMS ABOUT HOW THEIR LIVES OUGHT TO BE. When things don't work out the way they had pictured, they tend to blame other people or situations.

They don't realize that the bad feelings come from their own thinking.

"When things are bad, people say to themselves, 'Things aren't the way I like them,' and then say, 'That's terrible, that's awful' — meaning they think things are so bad that they shouldn't or mustn't be that way," says Albert Ellis, Ph.D., the creator of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and author of *Feeling Better, Getting Better, Staying Better*.

However, it's normal to have to deal with difficult situations and difficult people as you go through life.

Here's how to change your thinking, so you can feel good when your life isn't perfect.

Unconditionally Accept Yourself

Most people want to do well in order to feel good about themselves and be loved by the significant people in their lives. But this way of thinking can make you feel crazy.

"It's important to accept yourself whether or not you do well and whether people who are important to you love you," says Ellis. "Don't think, 'I have to do well,' because then, if you don't, you'll worry. Instead, just prefer to do well. Even when people are doing well and being loved by significant people, they worry about tomorrow."

Don't Overgeneralize

You can evaluate what you think, feel and do, but don't give yourself a generalized rating. You're like a diamond in the making and have many facets. Some shine brilliantly, and others still need to be polished.

"People generalize and say, 'I failed a few times, and I might fail again.' That's true enough, but then they stupidly overgeneralize and say, 'I failed a few times, and I'm a failure.' You can't be a failure or a success," says Ellis. "But you can fail at things and be successful at things."

Even evaluating yourself as a good person creates stress, because you'll always have to live up to your image and do good things. The truth is that you do thousands of things — some good, some bad.



It's important to accept yourself whether or not you do well and whether important people in your life love you.

Unconditionally Accept Others

You may get angry with relatives, friends, co-workers or other people because of things they've done. You'll feel far less miserable if you feel disappointed, instead.

"You can think, 'I don't like their behavior, but they're fallible humans who sometimes do good and sometimes behave badly. I can accept them and not make myself incensed or furious at them,'" says Ellis. "You can judge their behavior as bad or wicked, but never judge them, as people, as bad, evil or rotten."

This doesn't mean you should tolerate bad behavior. You can still try to get them to change how they behave, but you can do it without anger.

Unconditionally Accept Life

Many bad things may happen to you in your life, but you don't have to view them as terrible, because you can handle them and even be happy in spite of them. Therefore, it's not the bad things that upset you — it's your view of them.

Feeling bad comes from demanding that something turn out a certain way.

"A demand says, 'I have to have something, or to have something turn out a certain way, and it's terrible and I'm no good if I don't have it,'" says Ellis. "You don't need life to be good. It's preferable, of course — highly preferable — but it's not a necessity."

*Harriet Meyerson spoke with Albert Ellis, Ph.D., the creator of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and author of *Feeling Better, Getting Better, Staying Better*, Impact Publishers Inc., 2001, \$15.95.*

wellness quiz

What Do You Know About Alcohol Abuse?

1. Alcohol abuse is greatest among which of these age groups?

- a. 15- to 17-year-olds
- b. 18- to 29-year-olds
- c. 30- to 54-year-olds
- d. 55 and older

2. How many drinks per day is defined as low or moderate alcohol consumption for women?

- a. one
- b. two
- c. three
- d. four

3. Which of these is a symptom of alcohol abuse?

- a. feeling guilty about drinking
- b. drinking alone
- c. morning nausea, shakiness
- d. all of the above

4. If not stopped, alcoholism can decrease your life by how many years?

- a. 20 years
- b. 15 years
- c. 10 years
- d. 5 years



Alcohol Abuse Answers

- 1. B — 18- TO 29-YEAR-OLDS. One in every 13 adults abuses alcohol; the highest rate is among young adults.
- 2. A — ONE. For men, it's two drinks.
- 3. D — ALL OF THE ABOVE. The bottom line: You're abusing alcohol if you experience negative consequences when you drink.
- 9. B — 15 YEARS. Alcoholism increases the risk of certain cancers, pancreatitis and liver damage.

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DIGEST

Deep vein thrombosis, the development of blood clots in deep veins, can occur during long airline flights. Portions of these clots can break loose and travel to the lungs, causing acute breathing difficulty and cardiac arrest. To help prevent the problem: Drink plenty of water while in the air. Get up and walk around the plane several times. Stretch your legs and rotate your feet while seated. **VOD 884**

University of Washington Health Science and Medical Affairs, Seattle.

Middle-aged men who spent a total of at least two hours a week doing vigorous exercise had a 60 percent lower risk of heart attack than sedentary men did, one study found.

The New England Journal of Medicine, P.O. Box 9135, Waltham, MA 02254, weekly, \$120.56/yr.

Use a tartar-control toothpaste if your dentist says you have a plaque problem. But because such a paste can be abrasive, alternate using it with a regular-formula product.

Real Simple, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020, 10 times a year, \$19.95/yr.

To eat more healthfully, 57 percent of Americans say they have reduced their use of saturated fat/oils when preparing food at home; 49 percent have reduced their use of salt; 48 percent eat more fresh fruits/vegetables; 48 percent have reduced their use of sugar; and 44 percent use more olive oil.

International Communications Research, Media, PA.

Always clear your desk at the end of the day. That way, when you arrive the next morning, you'll automatically address the most important issue, not the one still staring you in the face from the day before.

10 Minute Guide to Managing Your Time by Jeff Davidson, Macmillan USA, 2000, \$10.95.